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COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

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Committee Asks: Do Veterans Fare Better with Representation?

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Today, the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs held a hearing entitled "From the Inside Out: A Look at Claims Representatives' Role in the Disability Claims Process" to determine if veterans who receive competent representation fare better in VA's disability claims process than those without, and if those with representation make the system more efficient.

"Study after study shows that veterans with representation have a greater chance at recovering their earned benefits than if they are not represented by a VSO, agent, or attorney," stated Rep. Jeff Miller, Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs. "But this is not an issue of money; it is an issue of ensuring that VA is processing claims accurately the first time and putting the emphasis on quality over quantity."

VA's claims backlog has been growing steadily the past three years, from less than 400,000 in 2009 to nearly 900,000. Despite increased pressure from the Committee to implement more training for claims processors, as well as providing veterans the ability to submit information electronically, more than 576,101 veterans' claims have been waiting for more than 125 days to have their claims decided.

Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) urged the Committee to review VA's disability claims process from the service officer's point of view to highlight the obstacles they face in helping veterans file their claims.

"The areas of greatest concern [is] the Veterans Benefit Administration's (VBA) inability to provide prompt and full access to records and VBA's unconscionably long delays in claim processing," said Paul Sullivan of NOVA, an organization that provides training to attorneys and non-attorney practitioners who represent veterans in the claims process.

The sentiment was reiterated by Randall Fisher of The American Legion, who noted, "For the past several years, VA has received over a million claims for benefits each year. In order to tame this rising backlog, we recognize we will all have to work together."

"VSOs fulfill an invaluable service to our veterans by aiding them in navigating a complex and confusing system," Miller said. "Placing the veteran and his or her needs at the center of our objective facilitates the spirit of cooperation to improve the system. Our veterans deserve nothing less."

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